

How did the Framers resolve the conflict about representation in Congress?

LESSON PURPOSE

In this lesson you will learn about the disagreement the Framers had about how many representatives each state should be able to send to Congress. You will learn what compromises the Framers reached to resolve the conflict.

When you finish this lesson, you should be able to explain the reasons for the conflict and how it was resolved.

13



TERMS TO UNDERSTAND



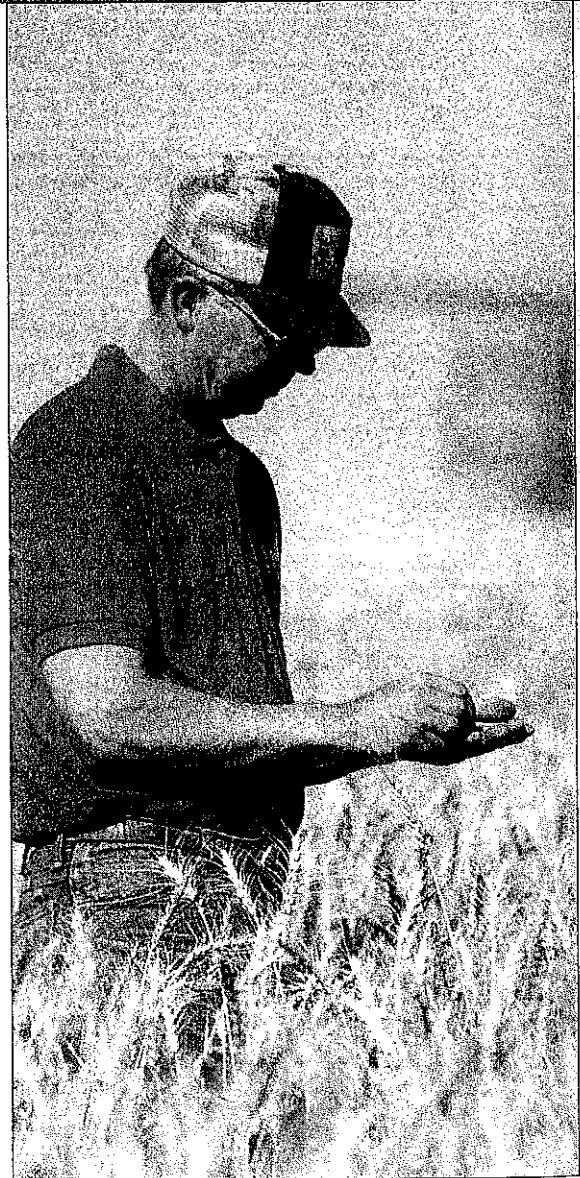
equal representation
Great Compromise
New Jersey Plan
proportional representation
Virginia Plan

What important conflict existed between the large and small states?

One of the most important conflicts at the Philadelphia Convention was about representation. The Framers disagreed about how many representatives each state should be able to send to Congress. The conflict was between delegates from states with small populations and delegates from states with large populations.

Small states. The small states feared that the states with larger populations would control the national government. To avoid this problem, the small states wanted each state to have the same number of representatives in Congress. This is called **equal representation**.

Large states. The delegates from the states with larger populations thought that equal representation was unfair. A state with more people should have more votes. The large states wanted to base the number of representatives in Congress on the number of people living in a state. This is called **proportional representation**.

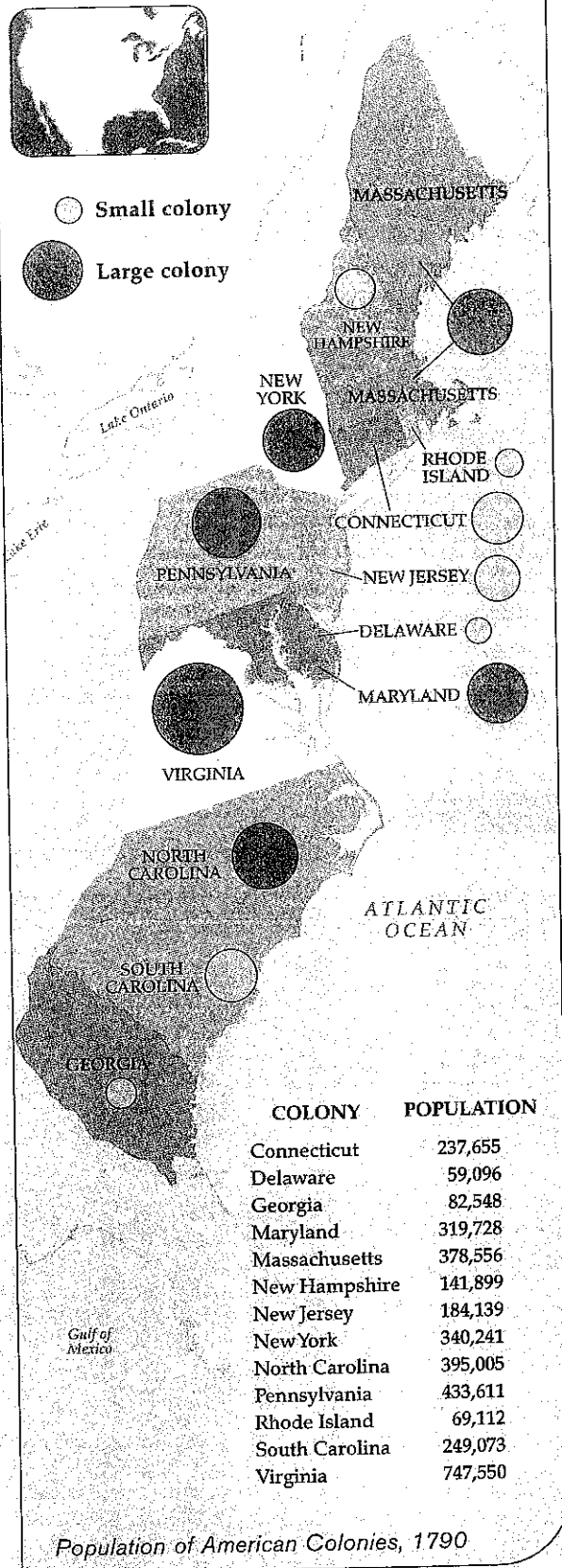


Why might people in states with smaller populations favor equal representation?

Which method of representation might better serve the states?

Work with a partner. Examine the population figures in the box below. Discuss the questions with your partner. After your discussion, explain your ideas to the class.

- 1 Assume that in 1790 the small states were those with fewer than 250,000 people.
 - How many total votes would the small states have?
 - How many total votes would the large states have?
 - Explain why the small states favored equal representation in Congress.
- 2 Assume that the number of representatives from each state in Congress is the same and each state has one vote.
 - How many total votes would the large states have?
 - How many total votes would the small states have?
 - Explain why the large states favored proportional representation.
- 3 Assume there is one representative in Congress for every 30,000 people and each representative has one vote.
 - How many total votes would the large states have?
 - How many total votes would the small states have?
 - Explain why the large states favored proportional representation.
- 4 Explain why the disagreement about representation in Congress was so important to the states.



What was the Virginia Plan?

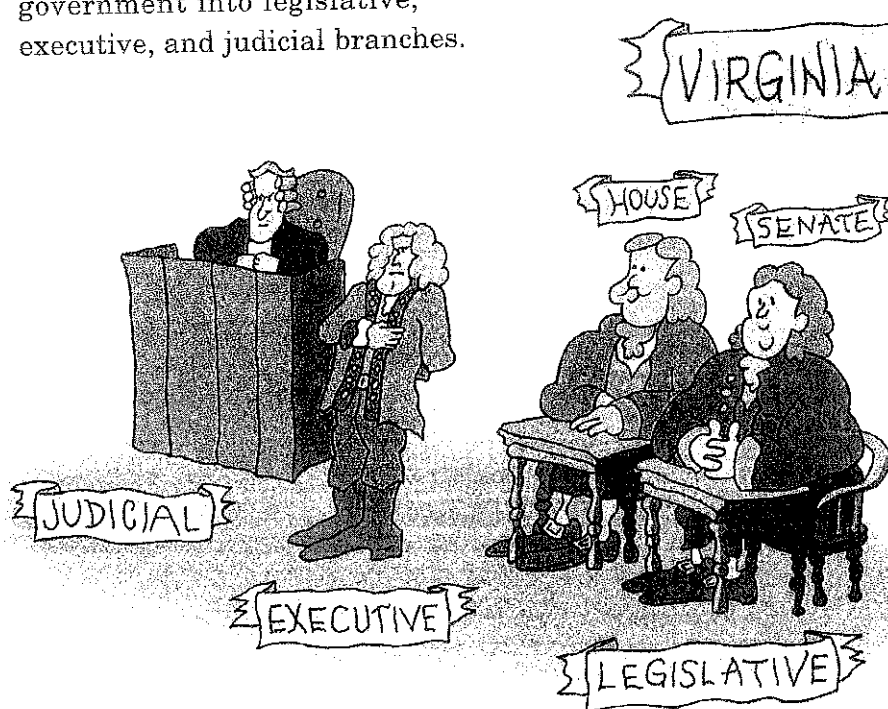
Before the convention started, James Madison had drafted a plan for a national government. He called it the **Virginia Plan**.

- The Virginia Plan proposed a strong national government.
- Under the Virginia Plan, two governments would govern the people. They would be individual state governments and the national government. Both state and national governments would get their power from the people. This is what we now call a federal system.
- The national government would have the power to make and enforce its own laws. It would have the power to collect its own taxes.
- The Virginia Plan divided the government into legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

- The national legislature was to have two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- The number of representatives in each house would be proportional.

There was considerable debate in the convention about the different parts of the Virginia Plan. The part that created the biggest problem was representation. The larger states favored proportional representation in both houses of Congress. The small states opposed the idea. The smaller states said that unless they had an equal voice in Congress, the larger states would dominate them.

By the middle of June, the debate about representation was no longer making progress. The delegates from the small states asked for time to come up with an alternative to the Virginia Plan.



Under the Virginia Plan, where would the federal and state governments get their power?

What was the New Jersey Plan?

William Paterson of New Jersey led the group of small states to develop a new plan for representation. Their plan was called the **New Jersey Plan**. The New Jersey Plan followed the framework of the Articles of Confederation.

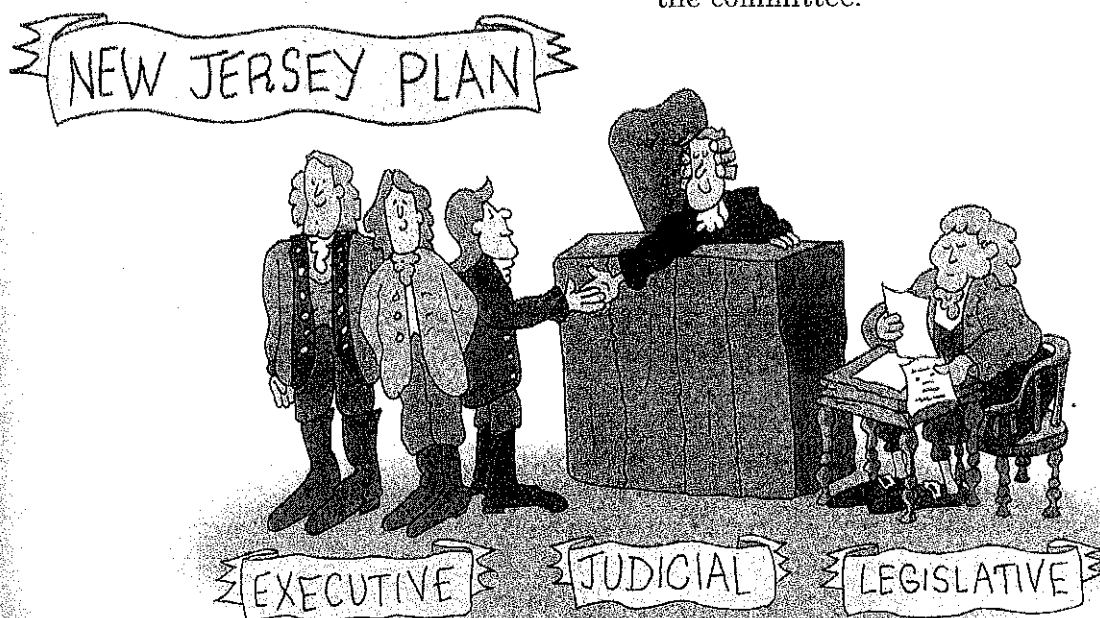
- It favored a weak national government.
- It called for only one house of Congress.
- Each state would have equal representation.
- Congress would have the power to collect taxes on products and stamps, as well as to levy fines and collect money from the states if they refused to pay their taxes.

Congress also would have the power to regulate trade among the states and with other nations.

The New Jersey Plan also proposed executive and judicial branches of government. Congress would appoint several persons to serve in the executive branch. The executive branch would appoint the members of a U.S. Supreme Court.

The convention debated the New Jersey Plan. The Framers saw that neither the Virginia Plan nor the New Jersey Plan solved the problem of representation. The convention remained divided on this issue. Neither side was willing to accept the position of the other. Tension was growing. Some delegates threatened to quit and go home.

Finally, the convention decided to appoint a special committee to try to solve the conflict. One delegate from each state was asked to serve on the committee.

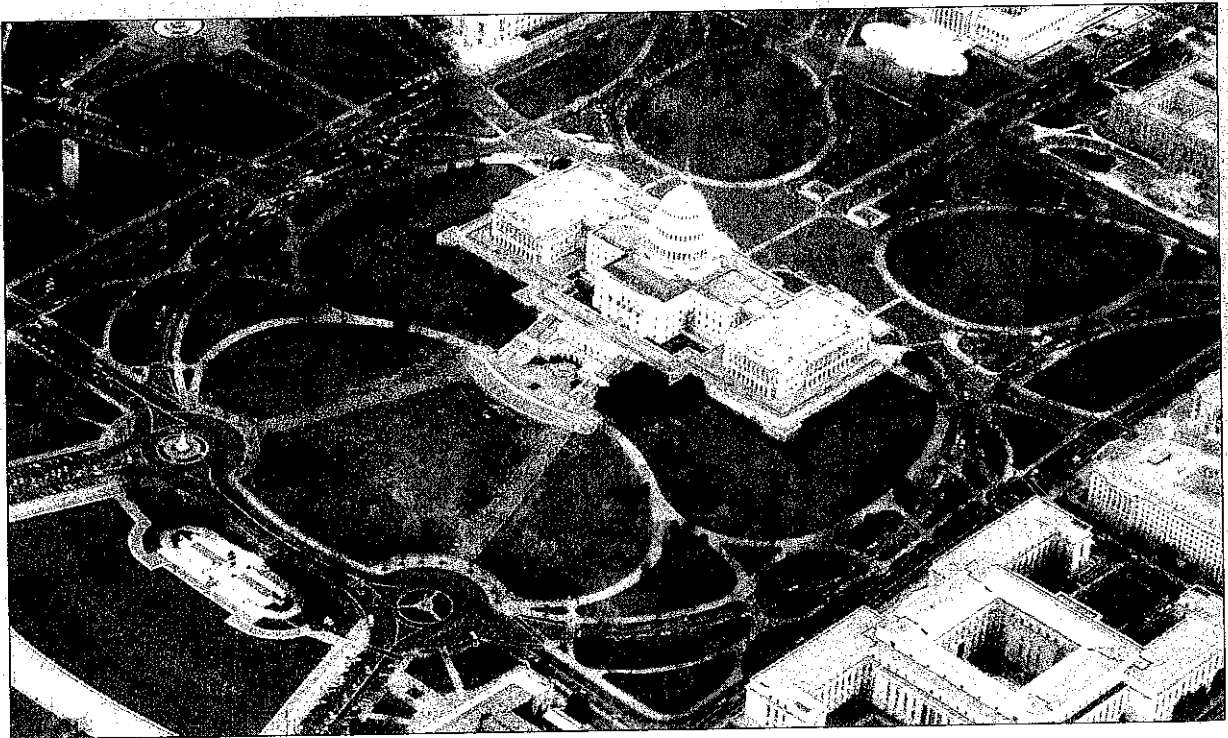


How did the New Jersey Plan differ from the Virginia Plan? How were they the same?

How would you solve the problem of representation in Congress?

Work with a group of five students. Imagine that each group is a committee formed to solve the problem of representation in Congress. Each committee should have students who represent small states and students who represent large states. The task of each committee is as follows.

- ① Examine the descriptions of the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan in this lesson. Decide whether Congress should have one or two houses. Then decide on the number of representatives each state should send to Congress. To resolve the problem, you may need to write a new plan.
- ② Select a spokesperson to present your plan to the entire class. All members of the committee may help to clarify the plan and defend it against criticisms by members of the other committees.
- ③ Each committee may revise its plan if it wishes. Then, put the plan on the board or chart paper and display it in your class.
- ④ Finally, the entire class should compare the plans developed by each committee. The class should try to reach an agreement on the question of representation. Compare the plan you have developed with the plan arrived at by the Framers.



Should Congress have one or two houses? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?

How did the Great Compromise solve the problem of representation?

The committee appointed to solve the problem of representation came up with the Connecticut Compromise. It is now called the Great Compromise. The Great Compromise has three parts.

- Congress would have two houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- Membership in the House would be based on proportional representation. The House would have the power to develop all bills dealing with taxes and government spending. As you learned from Lesson 5, a bill is a proposed law.
- Membership in the Senate would be based on equal representation. At first, the Senate only had power to accept or reject bills related to taxes and spending passed in the House. This power was later modified to let the Senate make changes to bills involving taxes and spending developed in the House.

As in most compromises, each side received a little and each gave up a little. The small states got equal representation in the Senate. The large states got proportional representation in the House. Also, the House would have important powers related to taxing and spending.

The compromise meant that the large states would have slightly more influence over issues of taxes and spending. In the Senate, the small states could check the large states by changing or rejecting taxes and spending bills passed in the House. The Great Compromise was hotly debated. It finally passed by one vote.



Can you name your representatives in the House and Senate? To find out the names of your representatives in Congress, go to www.senate.gov and www.house.gov.

LESSON REVIEW

- ① What is the difference between equal representation and proportional representation? Why did the small states want equal representation? Why did the large states want proportional representation?
- ② What was the Virginia Plan?
- ③ What was the New Jersey Plan?
- ④ How did the Great Compromise solve the conflict about representation? What did the small states and the large states gain as a result of the Great Compromise?

ACTIVITIES

- ① Find out who represents your state in the U.S. Senate. Visit their web pages on the Internet. Write a brief biography of your senators to share with your class.
- ② For purposes of representation in the House of Representatives, each state is divided into congressional districts. There is one representative for each district. Find the number of congressional districts in your state. Find the name of the person who represents your congressional district. Visit his or her website. Write a brief biography of your representative in the House to share with the class.